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Speech Act Markers in Mandarin Chinese

Abstract

This study investigates the functions of speech act markers in Mandarin Chinese and develops a systematic classification of those markers according to their functions. Speech act markers are language elements that facilitate the realization of a speech act without adding propositional content. They help express the speaker's opinions, attitudes, or feelings, or involve the hearer in the interaction. While these speech act markers or pragmatic markers have been studied extensively for Western languages (for a recent collection see Fedriani & Sansó 2017), research on Chinese speech act markers is still scarce (e.g. Ran Yongping 2000, Feng Guangwu 2004, Wang Rui 2013).

A list of 324 potential speech act markers was identified and a preliminary classification system was developed. To investigate the use and functions of speech act markers in modern Mandarin Chinese, we extract examples from various online corpora (the Media Language Corpus (MLC), the Center for Chinese Linguistics corpus (CCL), a corpus of TV series), and a small self-built corpus of informal conversations.

The ultimate purpose of this study is threefold: (i) show the range and distribution of functions each speech act marker can serve, (ii) show the range and distribution of expressions serving the various speech act marking functions, and (iii) produce a preliminary description of genre differences in the use of speech act markers. This poster presents steps toward the first two of these aims.

Multifunctionality of Speech Act Markers

Marker	Example	Translation	Function
怎么说呢 how can I say (it)	主持人: “你觉得用‘倒霉’这个词可以概括这件事吗?” 嘉宾: “我觉得, 怎么说呢? 现在我们当然还不能百分之百地说于女士一定是无辜的, 但是越来越觉得离她是无辜的较近。”	Host: "Do you think the word 'unlucky' can be used to describe this event?" Guest: "I think, how can I say (it)? now we can't say for 100 percent that the lady must be innocent, but we feel more and more that she is innocent."	Uncertainty
	他其实做了很多好的事情, 唉... 怎么讲呢 , 这些努力没有得到大家的认可。	He actually did a lot of good things. Well, how can I say (it)? His efforts have not been recognized by everyone.	Mitigation
这样子 this way, like this	这样子 , 明天我陪她来, 你不要收她的钱; 要收我的。	(Let's do it this way : I will accompany her to come tomorrow. Don't take the money from her, but from me.	Suggestion
	现在从台北飞上海只要一个半小时的时间, 如果说10月份虹桥机场又可以开通的话, 这样子 , 台北直飞上海的时程又可以缩短。	It takes only 1.5 hours to fly from Taipei to Shanghai now. If Hongqiao Airport is opened in October, that means , the time for flying from Taipei to Shanghai will be further shortened.	Inference
瞧你 look at you	瞧你 , 总是在我最需要的时候出现。	Look at you , you always come to me when I am in need.	Approval
	他回头一看, 只见戴女士仍然坐在汽车里, 两手叉在胸前, 表情显得很严峻, 仿佛在嗔怪他: “ 瞧你 , 多没礼貌。”	He looked back and saw that Ms Dai still sat in the car, two arms crossed in front of the chest, with serious look on the face, and seemed to want to say, “ Look at you , you're so impolite.”	Disapproval

Categorization of Speech Act Markers

Speech-act oriented focusing on current speech act	Backward looking Relating to own prior speech	Reactive reacting to partner's action	Eliciting eliciting a reaction (forward looking)
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Function	Example	Translation
Unexpectedness	田大姐又说: “你们不知道, 他是打算召集你们几个区的领导干部来开个会, 谁成想 , 他刚把信打发走了, 就发生了个情况。”	Aunt Tian continued, “you didn't know that he intended to call you leaders of these several districts to have a meeting, but who ever expected that soon after that he sent the mail, this happened.”
Dissatisfaction	好啦!现在全泡汤了, 咱们也不用开会了, 真是的 , 我都计划好了的, 现在这么一拖延, 后边的事情麻烦可就大了。	All right! All is spoiled now, and we don't have to have the meeting, damn , I had made a very good plan. Now it is delayed, and there will be a big problem.
Certainty	好了, 从这个角度来说, 毫无疑问 , 大家都应该是一样的。	Well, from this perspective, undoubtedly , all the people should be equal.
Uncertainty	相信不久的将来, 没准儿 “发烧友” 们能真正注目我们大陆的明星。	I believe that in the near future, probably , enthusiasts will notice the pop stars in the mainland.
Emphasis	不要再抱怨了, 你也不想 你爸妈挣钱养你容易吗?	Stop complaining! Don't you realize , is it easy for your parents to earn money to support you?
Mitigation	而且, 我斗胆地说一句吧 , 也只有懂得了这一点才能真正懂得侯宝林。	Furthermore, I am bold enough to say this : only if we understand this point, can we understand Mr. Hou Baolin.
Vagueness	大致说来 , 对权利的界定有伦理的和实证的分别。	Roughly speaking , there are differences between the ethical and the empirical in the definition of rights.
Inference	看这意思 你是有点儿不大相信。	It seems that you are not quite convinced.
Comment	其实我真的是一个特别渴求安定的人, 然而 讽刺的是 , 日后在职业生涯中, 我却成了一个“吉卜赛人”。	Actually, I am a person who has been longing to settle down, but ironically , later in my career, I become a gypsy.
Opinion	我琢磨 这个想法好。	I think that this is a good idea.
Threat	我把丑话说前头 , 从今以后, 如果让我抓到了证据, 我就对不起你了。	Let's do it this way : I will accompany her to come tomorrow. Don't take the money from her, but from me.
Suggestion	这样子 , 明天我陪她来, 你不要收她的钱; 要收我的。	Let's do it this way : I will accompany her to come tomorrow. Don't take the money from her, but from me.
Clarification	这个情况其实要逆转, 并不难, 我的意思是 说它需要一点时间。	It is not so difficult to reverse the situation. I mean , it needs a little time.
Agreement	“您上瘾了吗? 您想继续赢下去吗?” “ 的确 , 我觉得我是有这种感觉, 也觉得想再赢下去。”	“Are you addicted? Do you want to continue to win?” “ Absolutely , I think I have this intention and I want to continue to win.”
Disagreement	左左: 就为这口吃的。立新: 什么呀 , 你这说话的, 出差不是为吃的, 出差是为了公事。	“You went there just for some food.” “ Nonsense , I went there not for food, but for business.”
Approval	嘉宾: 英国老太太就特别喜欢。主持人: 不错 , 英国老太太喜欢, 中国老太太也喜欢。	Guest: “English elderly women especially like it.” Host: “ Great , English elderly women like it and Chinese elderly women also like it.”
Disapproval	他回头一看, 只见戴女士仍然坐在汽车里, 两手叉在胸前, 表情显得很严峻, 仿佛在嗔怪他: “ 瞧你 , 多没礼貌。”	He looked back and saw that Ms Dai still sat in the car, two arms crossed in front of the chest, with serious look on the face, and seemed to want to say, “ Look at you , you're so impolite.”
Approval-probing	然后光有文化中心还不够, 还得建别的嘛, 是吧?	Then, the cultural center is not enough, and it is necessary to build something else, isn't it?
Attention-getting	我以前有辆汽车, 你猜怎么着 , 上、下班不如骑自行车快, 后来就把它卖了。	I used to own a car. Guess what? It is slower to drive the car than to ride a bicycle to go to work. Later, I sold it.
Feedback-requesting	这些钱咱们一家一半, 行不行?	Our two families will share this money. All right?

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